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VIRGINIA'S FIRST 2005 WEST NILE VIRUS ACTIVITY IDENTIFIED IN HENRICO COUNTY MOSQUITOES

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) announced today that a mosquito pool collected in the Monument Avenue area of Henrico County tested positive for West Nile virus. This is the first indication of West Nile virus activity in Virginia in 2005.

The mosquitoes were collected by Henrico County Department of Public Work's Vector Surveillance and Control program on July 13. The state's Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services confirmed that the mosquito pool was positive for the virus on July 18.

"Though we are experiencing a slightly delayed onset of West Nile virus activity this year, this positive test is a reminder that West Nile virus is still present in Virginia and could build to high levels this summer if conditions permit. Now is the time for people to eliminate mosquito breeding areas around their home and to learn how to protect themselves from mosquito-borne illnesses," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H.

Last year, Virginia's first West Nile virus activity was detected in an infected horse in Culpeper County on May 1, and the first infected mosquitoes were found in Fairfax County on June 16. Five human cases of West Nile virus, including one death were confirmed in Virginia in 2004. In addition, a total of 26 birds, 15 horses, and 432 mosquito pools tested positive for West Nile virus in Virginia last year. West Nile virus was first detected in Virginia in the fall of 2000.

West Nile virus is spread to birds, humans, horses and other mammals through the bite of an infected mosquito. Most people bitten by an infected mosquito do not get sick. People who do get sick usually suffer a mild flu-like illness. People over age 50 are at greatest risk of serious illness, such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord).

VDH recommends the following tips to reduce exposure to mosquitoes:

- Wear long, loose and light-colored clothing.
- Make sure window and door screens in your home are functional and in place
- Use insect repellent products registered with the Environmental Protection Agency such as products containing DEET, Picaridin, or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus. When using a product containing DEET, no more than 50 percent DEET should be used for adults and less than 30 percent should be used for children. Follow instructions when using insect repellents.

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- Turn over, drain, or remove containers in your yard where water collects, such as old tires, potted plant trays, buckets and toys.
- Fill in or drain root-ball holes (from downed trees) or any depression that holds water for more than a week.
- Eliminate standing water on tarps or flat roofs, and in boats.
- Clean out birdbaths and wading pools once a week.
- Clean roof gutters and downspout screens regularly.

For more information on West Nile virus, visit www.vdh.virginia.gov

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